

Spectrums, rubber keys, parking fines, OpenLDAP and replacement windows

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The rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated. Although come to think of it, I do feel a bit of rigor mortis settling in, could be something to do with the fact that last night was the first time at the gym for nearly 3 weeks. Anyway, much has happened, I lead an army, stormed through Europe, conquered Asia and now rule half the world... oh wait, that was Alexander not me, another life, another movie maybe. When the morning comes and you wake up realising that you are not the one to start the revolution, you are not the one to find the undiscovered species or the missing link, you are not the one to write the book that will fundamentally change the beliefs of and unite the peoples of the world, that you are not the one to positively change humanity with the invention of costless, abundant, pollution free energy, when that time comes, do you feel it? I think I had that revelation this morning, so I cleaned my teeth, took a shower, got dressed and made my way down stairs to make a cup of tea and slice of toast, with marmalade of course!

With absolutely nothing to do with the above and for anyone that actually reads the blurb spewed in these blogs I can inform you that I was not compelled to run naked down the high street with a traffic cone on my head singing "my old man's a dustman", suffer copious amounts of Mr Patel's extra strength vindaloo, but I did enjoy the vast quantities of Guinness. Yes, the installation went fine (in a roundabout sort of way). Oh yes, there were the niggles and gripes, teething problems, times that I had to resort to the beating the insolent teenager of technology with a hammer to get it to work, but in the end it did just that. What on earth am I talking about? Well... the customer of mine, Mr Windows, is now Mr Linux (apart from a couple PCs) and so is his network of around 100 or so workstations. Working like a charm (or curse?). Open office is in full swing, OpenLDAP proved a complete bitch to install and configure but perseverance is the key and if I had persevered that much in my marriages I'd be a far richer man! Anyway, as far as a viable alternative to a windows network, Linux does provide the goods. I really thought I would lose the bet when I hit the user accounts/validation brick wall but on reading and tinkering, getting it wrong, getting bits surprisingly right, abundant scratching of head, reading and posting, it was eventually sorted. A couple of the PCs were running some 3rd party software controlling a couple of manufacturing machines so these stayed, I wasn't prepared to get that messy and totally balls it up. As far as the experiment is concerned, I think I will mark this one up as a success. The office admin have just about everything they need to work, databases, spreadsheets, fax, scanners, word processing, card games, internet and email. I had to tweak quite a few lines of JavaScript to get the intranet working properly, basically copy and paste to modify the DOM object running under Mozilla. Luckily I had previously written his website and intranet on apache and used Java/Jsp so plugging it in wasn't a problem and some of the C# work was moved to run under Mono, again, some tweaking and configuring but we got there in the end. I moved across most of the MS SQL databases to MY SQL with a few tweaks to the scripts and data transferred through an amalgamation of ODBC queries, BCP and brute force to prise it all in. It all took longer than I thought to complete but some valuable lessons were learned. I'll keep the patient under constant observation for a while until it can be taken out of critical care but the prognosis is looking good and the transplant is looking to be a success. Wipe please Nurse! Scalpel, backup tape, CD.

The poisons of choice were Kubuntu for the desktops/laptops, Ubuntu LAMP server, and another Ubuntu lamp minus

the AMP but running OpenLDAP. The configuration worked fine for this installation and, after the initial demo, has been accepted by the customer as a good alternative and a huge saving on licenses that, for a small business, is a godsend. I didn't have the heart to tell him that I was learning this stuff as I went along, that would have probably put the fear of God into his chequebook and his writing hand.

Whilst all this was going on, and it was a lot considering I'm contracted to big blue 5 days a week, I (we, my wife and 🐶 had the outlaws (in-laws) over from Moscow. It was a bit of a squeeze to play the dutiful son-in-law that was lazy and didn't learn Russian properly, but showing his face and taking the chauffeur role. And, as luck would have it, my new HTC arrived whilst they were here so I had to fit in the configuration of that, getting everything to work under windows mobile 5! I tried to put it to one side and leave it to not be so ignorant but, I am weak, I have no will power... (apart from kicking the nasty cig habit, but that re-emerges when the alcohol level increases). I was magnetically drawn to the study... why is it that I can't leave things alone, it came with a nice Vodafone branded ROM, one visit to xda-developers.com and voila, a bastardisation of HTC, TMobile, O2 and Vodafone and 8 hours trying to get it to work again.

Final note, on trawling through eBay I had a bit of a nostalgic pang, so now I am the proud owner of:

1 x Sinclair ZX81

1 x Sinclair Spectrum 48k (rubber key of course!)

1 x Sinclair Spectrum +

1 x Sinclair Spectrum +2

1 x Sinclair Spectrum +3

Lots of bits, microdrives, thermal printers etc etc.

Why? Because I could! I wanted to feel that "new" feeling again, that time when I got my first computer, a Sinclair ZX81 in 1981(ish), closely followed the next year by the 48k rubber key Spectrum, and an insatiable need to know how the computer and its programs worked. If only I could go back and bash that youngster around the head with the Kempston interface, Just look at the life it lead me too!!

What else? Hmm, erm, well had an argument with a traffic warden about a parking ticket. £30 they wanted and I had paid the parking meter! Pay and display, I did just that. Paid my £2, stuck it on the windscreen and meandered off into Blackpool with the in-laws in tow. On returning, big yellow notice stuck to the aforementioned screen. "You have not paid and displayed, pay in 2 weeks for £30 or £60 if left to run". The pay and display sticker had come unstuck and dropped on the dash, upside down. The notice said illegible and believed to be an infringement to clause 82. On calling Blackpool council and speaking the Vogons there, I concluded that it was better to pay the damn fine, only my wallet was in wife's handbag (well if she buys a wallet that won't fit in my pocket then she can bloody well carry the suitcase!). I called the Vogons again yesterday and paid and while I was waiting for the payment to be authorised, we exchanged polite pleasantries, some poetry and I joked about a refund of the £2 for parking. Then I was informed that if I had the original pay and display ticket I should have written in and explained the case to have the charge waived. Thank you very much Blackpool council. So now I have paid it and have written a pleading letter to get my money back. Snowball in hell.

If you're still awake and have read this far then you should really be a software developer as you can really take the boredom and huge amounts of confusing drivel! For those with the head on the desk and drool pouring out between the snores.... WAKE UP! It's home time!

Good night and good luck!

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